



NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

NEWS RELEASE

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State Health Department Issues Warning About Hantavirus Disease

BISMARCK, N.D. – People who are cleaning cabins or other buildings that were closed for the winter should protect themselves against hantavirus, a disease transmitted by infected mice, according to Michelle Feist, epidemiologist with the North Dakota Department of Health.

“Hantavirus infection has been associated with cleaning or occupying previously vacant cabins or other dwellings,” Feist said. “It’s important to take precautions while cleaning buildings that are infested with rodents. Preventing infection is important since there is no specific treatment for the disease.”

Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome (HPS) is a viral infection that causes severe lung disease. Mice carry the disease and can transmit the virus to people through bites, urine and fecal droppings. The disease is not transmitted from person to person.

Symptoms of HPS usually occur two to three weeks after infection. Early symptoms commonly include fever, muscle and body aches, fatigue, headache, dizziness, chills, nausea and vomiting. The illness worsens within a short period of time to include coughing and severe shortness of breath when lungs fill with fluid.

Nine cases of HPS have been reported to the North Dakota Department of Health since 1993; the most recent was reported in December 2006. Five of the North Dakota cases were fatal. Since 1993, 465 cases have been reported in the United States, of which 35 percent were fatal.

The Department of Health offers the following tips for preventing rodent infestation from occurring and for properly disinfecting areas that become contaminated by rodents:

- For severe or persistent infestations, contact a pest-control professional for rodent eradication or a building contractor for rodent exclusion (rodent proofing), or consult with the North Dakota Department of Health by calling 800.472.2180.
- Seal all entry holes through which a rodent can enter.

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Visit the health department home page at www.ndhealth.gov.

- Clear clutter and tall grass away from buildings to eliminate sources of nesting materials.
- **Do not** sweep or vacuum areas with evidence of rodent infestation, such as nests or fecal droppings. This action may stir up and aerosolize the viral particles.
- Wear rubber, latex, vinyl or nitrile gloves.
- Thoroughly wet contaminated area with a disinfectant or bleach solution before wiping up with a paper towel.

For more information, call Michelle Feist, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.2378.

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Please note: A fact sheet containing important precautions to minimize the risk of hantavirus pulmonary syndrome infection is available at www.ndhealth.gov/Disease.

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